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ABSTRACT

An ethnographic case study was done of a Hispanic American male high school student of limited English proficiency in order to present a description of the experience of a minority student adapting to and coping with U.S. school culture. The student was a 15-year old male who recently arrived in the United States from Cuba and attended the 10th grade in a central Virginia high school. Data were collected through observations in the classroom and ethnographic interviews to discover the cultural and linguistic factors affecting the student's progress in school. Results of data analysis and interpretation include the following: (1) although the student exhibited some at-risk characteristics and encountered many cultural discontinuities, he was succeeding in school; (2) the student's American peer group and some of his teachers exhibited a lack of cultural sensitivity; (3) the student's personal initiative, cognitive strengths, and playful interactive style enabled him to succeed in the classroom; (4) due to a desire to achieve in school, the student appeared able to overcome discontinuities between host and heritage cultures and struggles with his identity; and (5) the teacher in the English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) class used cooperative learning and other group techniques to compensate for the lack of community. Included are 1 appendix on ethnography and 15 references. (JB)

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ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF A HISPANIC ESL STUDENT

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ABSTRACT

A case study of a Hispanic ESL student, *Roberto*, was conducted in a central Virginia high school. The researcher used observations in the classroom and ethnographic interviews to discover the cultural and linguistic factors which are affecting the student's progress in school. Consistent with the premise of ethnography, qualitative methods of gathering and analyzing the information were chosen. Patterns of behavior and recurrent themes of discussion were learned through the observations and interviews. The most unexpected discovery was that although Roberto exhibited some at-risk characteristics and has encountered many cultural discontinuities, he is succeeding in school. There appears to be a lack of cultural sensitivity amongst the American peer group and some of the teachers, which influenced Roberto's perceptions of racism and separatism in this country. Nevertheless, his personal initiative, cognitive strengths, and playful interactive style have all enabled him to succeed in the classroom. He appears able to overcome discontinuities between his host and heritage cultures, as well as struggles with his identity, due to his desire to achieve in school. Roberto both demonstrated and expressed a very positive attitude toward the ESL class and teacher, and therefore a high level of confidence in learning English. The teacher used cooperative learning and other group techniques which compensated for the lack of community which is often felt by non-native students in American schools. It is believed that Roberto's future progress would be enhanced if American students were made more aware of multicultural concerns and encouraged to assist minority students in the process of adapting to a new society.

INTRODUCTION

Educators have in the last few decades rejected the ethnocentric concept of an American 'melting pot', where all ethnicities are assimilated into a single, dominant culture. The paradigm has shifted as educators have begun to understand American society in light of its inherent diversity, complexity, and varied people groups. This shift seems imperative since minority enrollment in the nation's largest school systems ranges from 70 to 96%. Furthermore, by the year 2000, studies indicate that one out of three Americans will be of an ethnic minority group (Cordeiro, 1991, p.2). Moreover, demographers predict that by the year 2020, the population of school-age children, ages five to 17, will be almost 50% ethnic minorities (Dodd, 1989, p.1). The implications of these population trends warrant extensive educational research. In just one English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom in the central Virginian high school where this research was conducted there are students from all over the world: Jordan, China, Japan, Vietnam, Mexico, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, and Burundi, among others. These minority students bring with them a mosaic of backgrounds, languages, learning styles, values, and needs which need to be recognized. Once aware of possible cultural differences, educational researchers can ascertain the most individually responsive educational methods for minority students.

It has become a well known and disturbing fact that of all the major racial/ethnic groups, the Hispanic population has the highest attrition rate in American public schools. On average 40% percent of Hispanic students leave high school before graduating; thus, students of Hispanic origin have about *twice* the dropout rate of those of non-Hispanic

origin (Trueba, 1989). The overall underachievement of Hispanic students in American schools is a disturbing trend which demands serious attention.

The number of Hispanic students in the public schools is high and continues to rise at faster rates than any other minority group. From the years 1980 to 1988 there was a 34% increase in the Hispanic population; this translates to an increase in population of nearly 5 million (Alvarez, 1990). By the year 2000 it is predicted that the Hispanic population will rise to approximately 47 million, compared to 44 million African-Americans (Cordeiro, 1991). The fertility rate among Hispanics is also high in comparison with other people groups. As such, by the turn of the century, Hispanics will account for over 10% of the U.S. population, and 16% of school aged children (Valdivieso and Davis, 1988).

The effects of these trends will be most strongly felt in specific regions of this country. Hispanics reside predominately in the southwestern and northeastern urban zones of the United States. In fact, almost 90% of Hispanics live in only 9 states; 5 of these are in the southwest (Vasqez & Ramirez-Krodel, 1989). Nevertheless, as the population continues to rise, the relative concentration of Hispanics will expand to other areas of the country as well.

PURPOSE

The trends of pluralism in American society and in particular the marked influx of Hispanic students into the schools are issues which must be confronted. Minority students bear values, backgrounds, beliefs, and cultural frameworks that are often unknown or misunderstood by the dominant society. The following case study of one Hispanic student aims to present a "slice of reality", a description of his particular

experience in the public school system. I have endeavored to present an accurate portrayal of Roberto in so far as I have come to know and understand him. I have sought to comprehend his characteristics and qualities, and to faithfully render his behaviors, attitudes and words. In the course of this study, I expected to find working hypotheses as to the cultural and linguistic factors which are affecting Roberto's progress in school. As well, I anticipated finding patterns of cultural discontinuities which might cause this at-risk student to struggle. However, possible reasons as to why Roberto is succeeding, despite the cards which are stacked against him, were also discovered--an unanticipated, but welcomed revelation.

RELATED LITERATURE

There have been various postulations as to why many Hispanic students are not succeeding in the American public school system. Each Hispanic student who leaves school early has a combination of cultural, ethnic, economic, and social factors which affect his or her decision. Parental role, low socioeconomic status/income level, and the student's response to this low status are all considered important contributing factors (Trueba, 1989). Concerning parental role, some Hispanic adults do not have a background in secondary education and therefore may not recognize the need to graduate. Socioeconomic status can also lead to a student s dropping out because the family may depend on his or her monetary earnings. The sociopsychological response is likewise important to consider; a child of low socioeconomic status may not have high expectations for his or her future (Velez, 1989).

However, cultural discontinuities and school-related reasons are also crucial in this formula. In fact, in her study of Hispanic dropouts, Davis (1990) found that school-related factors were one of the major causes of attrition. In fact, economic reasons followed behind school-related causes for failure. Given this, educators believe that teachers and schools have the power to intervene in the lives of at-risk minority students. The teacher who is aware of the possible cultural discontinuities which Hispanic students face in a white/Anglo-dominated society will be far more able to empower such students for success. As well, school districts and teachers that take responsibility for reducing the drop-out rates of Hispanic students will be likely to have a lasting impact. Ineffective teaching techniques and negative school environments are controllable; thus, action toward reform should begin in these realms.

For example, Velez (1989) found that confrontation with school administration had a significant effect on whether or not a Hispanic student decided to continue with his or her schooling. He postulates that this might be related to the students' feeling "alienated from educational goals and school officials" (Velez, 1989, p.120). He suggests that schools should evaluate some of their procedures, such as suspension, in order to better provide for at-risk students. He believes that schools must foster an environment where both academic and emotional development are encouraged.

Researchers have also begun to investigate the "exceptions" among Hispanic students. These are individuals who, despite possessing certain at-risk characteristics, have managed to succeed in the public schools. Cordeiro (1991) remarks that "little is actually known about the youth who possesses the identified correlates of failure, but

does not' (p. 4). Both internal and external factors contribute to the success or failure of the Hispanic student. Cordeiro (1991) found in her study that high- achieving Hispanic students had somehow bought into the notion that they would gain from their educational efforts (p.10). She further discovered that this internal belief was promoted by important caregivers and strong role models in their lives. Positive role models and supportive partnerships with adults helped the Hispanic students to construct an 'achiever identity' early in life (Cordeiro, 1991, p.25).

The Cuban student possesses certain background qualities and characteristics which are often not apparent in the Mexican or Puerto Rican student (Vasquez and Ramirez-Krodel, 1989). These differences appears to be related to their reasons for coming to the United States. Mexican and Puerto Rican families have tended to immigrate to the United States in hopes of finding economic gain and improvement; they are often classified as economic immigrants. In general, Cubans have come to this country as political immigrants in search of both economic freedom as well as liberation from the communist regime. Upon arriving in the United States, Cubans tend to have higher levels of education. However, the second wave of Cuban immigrants, which came around 1980, was a much poorer group and therefore had more difficulties adjusting; nonetheless they came voluntarily. The political enclave for the Cuban population tends to be Florida, and Miami in particular. It is significant to note that as political refugees, Cubans are unable to return to their homeland.

William Velez (1989) asserts that "in contrast to Puerto Ricans and Chicanos, Cubans are more trusting of schools because their immigration was voluntary, owing to

political and ideological factors..." (p.120). He furthermore says that Cubans will endure hardship, prejudice, and language barriers in order to achieve academic success (p.122). The Cuban attrition rate is lower than other Hispanic sub-groups; studies indicate that Cuban students who are new arrivals to this country are less likely to drop out. In contrast, newly arrived Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, are more likely to leave high school.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

In order to discover the cultural discontinuities which Roberto might be facing, I had to understand the patterns and characteristics of the student's background culture and present environment. There are numerous overlapping issues which must be considered in cross-cultural research of this type: cultural differences, inherent beliefs and values, styles of interaction, sense of time, infrastructure, and language (Merryfield, 1985). Thus, a holistic method was needed in order to accurately describe Roberto's patterns of behavior. With such intricate and related concepts, no variables could be isolated. Rather, all contributing factors had to be considered.

As such, a qualitative approach was the most appropriate means of revealing the multiple ways in which this student organizes and orders, constructs and interprets his world. This report is about Roberto first and foremost; however, it is also about my experiences with ethnography. I have struggled with the need to understand, and often justify the method selected throughout the process of this research. Thus, what I have discovered about the ethnographic approach to educational research has been as valuable as what I have learned from Roberto.

Lincoln & Guba (1985) state that "qualitative methods are more sensitive to and adaptable to the many mutually shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered" in educational research (p.40). The ethnographic case study provides a natural, qualitative framework and "starts with a conscious attitude of almost complete ignorance" (Spradley, 1979, p.4). The researcher becomes a participant observer in the world of the student(s) over a period of time. Through sustained acquaintance, the ethnographer can begin to understand the student's behaviors and actions. Through a series of encounters and interactions, the researcher begins to tentatively draw on tacit and experiential knowledge in order to better describe the behaviors of the students. Ideally, Lincoln & Guba (1985) state that "the investigator must become so much a part of the context that he or she can no longer be considered a 'disturbing' element..." (p.192). Therefore, because observations are always dependent both on time and context, a natural setting is crucial to ethnography.

The fundamental goal of ethnographic analysis is to reveal "the parts of a culture and their relationships as conceptualized by informants" (Spradley, 1979, p.93). Language is one means of discovering the ways in which an individual conceptualizes his or her environment. Therefore, the researcher who wants to fully understand the cognitive framework and behaviors of the minority student must communicate with the child in his or her home language. The more an individual has to say, the more difficult it will be to communicate these ideas in a second language. Thus, listening and speaking to the student in his or her native language adds credibility and clarity to the patterns discovered.

Rather than approaching the case study with a fixed hypothesis, the ethnographer gathers as much information as possible, while an emergent design is unfolding. As the design is revealed, schema and patterns are recorded and analyzed. The ethnographic case study calls for situational responsiveness, caution, sensitivity, and humility. In the ethnographic interview, the researcher asks broad questions which do not force the informant to respond in a predetermined way. Then, as cultural symbols are naturally uncovered, the researcher seeks to find the relationships among these symbols. The final case report will then be grounded, holistic, and life-like in nature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The primary goal of such a report is discovery, description, and working hypotheses, not generalizations.

Since the primary goal of ethnography is not to arrive at generalizations, I could not infer that the discoveries made about Roberto should be universally applied to all Hispanic students. What was learned about one male Cuban student may not necessarily be applied to all female Puerto Rican students, for example. To assure this, I made an effort to be aware of the heterogeneity within the Hispanic population itself. To aggregate all Hispanics into one homogeneous group would have been erroneous, obscuring their individual identities. If cultural, social, ethnic, and personal factors all contribute to the personality of the student, then the student's *individual* identity as well as his connection to a larger cultural identity are both important.

SUBJECT

This case study was conducted primarily in the ESL classroom of a central Virginia high school. I began working with the ESL students at the school in early January of 1992. After several weeks of participant observation in the class, I chose one student with whom the case study would be conducted. I was looking for a student of Hispanic origin with limited proficiency in English and possible at-risk characteristics. These at-risk characteristics included: recent immigration to this country, low socioeconomic status, and coming from a single parent household. His name has been changed in order to preserve the anonymity of the report and protect the student's rights. It is significant to note, however, that this pseudonym was selected by Roberto himself.

Roberto is fifteen years old and in the 10th grade. He is from Cuba and arrived to the United States in March of 1991. An only child, he lives with his mother who immigrated from Cuba eleven years ago. His aunt and cousin live with them in a nearby trailer community. The whereabouts and identity of his father were never discovered. Until Roberto came to the U.S. for the first time, he was living with his grandmother in Cuba. Given the current communist regime in Cuba under Fidel Castro, Roberto will be unable to return to his homeland in the future. He is considered a political immigrant.

The ESL teacher recognized Roberto as possessing a lower proficiency in English than some of the other students; as such, in the classroom he is in the first level of language learning. There are four basic groupings in the class: A1, A2, B1 and B2. A1 is for students who are just beginning to acquire the language, while A2 is considered

low-intermediate. Roberto is now considered an A2 student, given his level of mastery in academic English.

SETTING

The high school which Roberto attends is located in central Virginia. There are about 1500 students in the school and the population is relatively heterogeneous. The majority of the observations were conducted in the ESL classroom, where there are students from many different countries. Roberto attends ESL classes for two periods a day in the morning and each class has about twenty students. The students come from Asia, the Middle East, South America, Africa, and Europe; however, more students are Asian than any other ethnicity. Roberto is one of six students from South American countries.

The philosophy of the ESL program in which Roberto participates incorporates several underlying concepts, according to the teacher who designed the curriculum. The teacher delineates these concepts as: total immersion, a communicative approach to language learning, a language-rich environment, a sequential exposure to grammar, an emphasis on academic English, and an anthropological approach to culture. Unlike the methods of a bilingual approach, all of the ESL classes are taught in English.

The teacher utilizes communicative situations such as drama and discussions, rather than a drill and repetition approach. Students spend time reading and listening to English which is slightly above their level of proficiency. While grammar is taught using a communicative approach, it is also introduced sequentially in the classroom. As well,

the teacher explains that the primary goal of the program is to equip the students to work successfully in their other academic subject areas. He contrasts this goal with that of "language functions", whereby the students learn to engage in social activities such as speaking on the telephone. Finally, in the written rationale of the curriculum, the teacher emphasizes tolerance and respect for the diversity of cultures in the classroom, coupled with an exposure to American culture.

PROCEDURE

In line with the tenets of naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, and ethnography, the following means were used to collect data on Roberto's behavior and patterns in the classroom and social situations:

1. **Interviews:**

   a. With Roberto: conducted primarily in Spanish and taped. Half-hour interviews using the model of Spradley's (1979) ethnographic interviewing techniques. Instead of beginning with preconceived ideas, the researcher begins in a state of naive ignorance, expecting the "informant" to teach him/her. For example, the first question asked was "Tell me about school...".

   b. With each of Roberto's teachers: to find out about his performance and behavior in their classes. These were not taped. I asked them to comment on Roberto's progress in their classes and took notes while they were speaking.

c. Group Interviews with Roberto's friends and fellow classmates; taped group interviews with the other Spanish-speaking students, conducted in Spanish. The themes of these interviews were derived from previous sessions in which topics were raised which were of concern to the students.

2. **Observations in the ESL class:**

a. *Length and Duration:* Twice a week for two hours each visit. Thus four hours a week for approximately eight weeks.

b. *As Participant Observer:* Worked side-by-side with the students and teacher. Field notes and a running log of observations were therefore written during and immediately following the sessions.

c. *Chronologs:* "Running accounts of behavior organized on fairly rigid time line" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.275). For example, time on task chronologs, record of volunteering in class, or interaction.

d. *Context Maps:* Maps, diagrams, sketches of context.

e. *Non-verbal Cues:* Taking note of Roberto's "exchange of information through nonlinguistic signs" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.276). For example, eye contact, posture, gestures, stance, etc.

f. *Journal:* Diary of thoughts and reactions to the field project, in order to check for personal bias or skewed viewpoints.

3. **Observations of Roberto in his other classes:** I shadowed him around to his other classes, observing and taking notes during these visits. I conducted one of the interviews with Roberto during this full day observation period.

4. **Social Situations:**

a) Informal observations of Roberto in various social situations, primarily conducted before school in the ESL classroom where students gathered. Attempts were made to meet outside of the classroom setting, but Roberto was not responsive to these suggestions so they had to be abandoned.

b) Accompanied Roberto and the rest of the ESL class on a field trip to Washington D.C. Conducted informal interviews and analyses during this trip of over fourteen hours in length.

5. **Documents/Records:** Analyses of papers and assignments done for his classes. (Roberto offered me copies of essays written for the ESL class.)

6. **Building Trustworthiness:** Denzin (1978) designated four methods of triangulation which promote the validity of qualitative study. I utilized methodological triangulation, whereby the researcher uses multiple methods in conducting the study. In this case the following were the primary methods: interviews (group and individual), interviews of teachers, observations, and study of documents.

In order to conduct the study, informed consent from Roberto and his mother were first attained. Since I had begun observing in early January, it was not unusual for me

to continue to come to the class regularly. After conducting formal observations for a week, Roberto and I had our first interview session in a conference room in the school. I asked him which language he preferred to use for the interviews and he chose Spanish. We conducted all of our interviews in Spanish, although occasionally we would discuss a particular issue in English. Before the first interview session, I explained the confidentiality of the report and asked him to choose a pseudonym for the write-up.

By asking broad lead-in questions, I allowed Roberto to choose the focus, shift the topics, and organize his thoughts on his own terms. The purpose of ethnography is to *describe* a culture from the native's point of view, basing the analysis on the informant's concepts and not the researcher's. The ethnographic interview is in fact a speech event and should therefore be as natural as possible. Thusly, themes and tangential shifts in the conversation could be analyzed to see whether they were imposed by me or chosen by Roberto. The types of questions asked followed Spradley's (1979) model:

- *Contrast questions*: How Roberto distinguishes the objects and events in his world. For example: "What are the differences between life here and in Cuba for you?"
- *Structural questions*: How Roberto structures knowledge. For example: "What were the different things you liked to do with your friends in Cuba?"
- *Descriptive questions*: Purpose of collecting an ongoing sample of Roberto's language. For example: "Could you describe school for me?" or "Could you tell me about a typical day in your school in Cuba?"

I next interviewed Roberto's teachers and shadowed him around to his classes, taking observational field notes. I asked him for copies of essays which he wrote for the ESL class and he gladly shared this information. Using all of the notes and information gathered, I recorded patterns of behavior and recurring themes which became evident in my experiences with Roberto. Based on the material gathered, I learned where the possible areas of cultural discontinuities and conflict lie. I also discovered working hypthoses as to his current success and made recommendations for future studies about the strategies which would encourage even greater achievement for Roberto in the school system.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following are a series of themes which emerged in the course of the interviews with Roberto and in his writing. Following this section are the patterns of behavior which I observed in the classroom and in social situations. The themes and observations presented are certainly not exhaustive; indeed, to claim that this report is a full description of Roberto would be naive. Nevertheless, I have selected the most recurrent ideas, and those which are especially relevant to his academic performance and cultural adjustment. These vignettes demonstrate how Roberto organizes and interprets his world, and are crucial in discussing where possible cultural discontinuities may lie. A discussion of the significance of these findings in light of the literature studied follows each vignette.

RECURRENT THEMES

Identity

Much of what was discovered about Roberto in the interview sessions can be placed in the category of personal identity and his view of self. In particular, the issue of his name and future aspirations are relevant in discussing identity. Although the issue of cultural heritage is linked to the questions of identity, I detail these findings separately since they were very extensive.

Names

Often when an immigrant or international student comes to this country, the student sheds his or her given name for a more Americanized name. Sometimes they *choose* to adopt a more Anglo name. Other times they are *given* a more American name. As shown in the following dialogue, this situation occurred with Roberto, who goes by "Bobby" in the classroom:[1]

I: ¿y por qué te llamas Bobby?

R: ¿Bobby? Las personas me llaman Bobby porque a lo primero cuando llegué a este país, al llegar a clase, los profesores decían como era mi nombre. Entonces, los alumnos no sabían decirlo, decían "err-o-berr-co" o decían "ro-bear-to", someting like dat, porque no es un

I: Why do you go by the name Bobby?

R: Bobby? People call me Bobby because at first when I arrived in this country, upon arriving to class, the teachers would ask me how to say my name. Then the students didn't know how to say it. They would say "err-o-berr-co" or they'd say "ro-bear-to", somthing like

[1]It is significant to note that the pseudonym "Roberto" is not as difficult to pronounce as his given name. As well, the diminutive name of "Bobby" has been changed to preserve anonymity.

nombre americano, es un nombre, eh... latino. Entonces, me pusieron Bobby.	that, because it isn't an American name. It's a...uh.... latin name. So, they called me Bobby.
I: ¿ellos te pusieron Bobby?	I: They gave you the name Bobby?
R: Bobby. Me dicen Bobby. Todos me dicen Bobby.	R: Bobby. They call me Bobby. Everyone calls me Bobby.
I: ¿y para ti está bien?	I: Is that okay with you?
R: Está bien...pero yo siempre afirmo cuando hay papeles importantes, yo siempre afirmo con el verdadero nombre porque después si pongo Bobby, ellos me buscan por el papel, y dicen: "¿quién es Bobby? Aquí no hay ningún Bobby".	R: It's ok... but I always sign, when there are important papers, I always sign with my real name. Because afterward, if I put Bobby, they look for me with the paper, and they say: "Who is Bobby? There's no Bobby here."

Although most people call him Bobby, I always used his real name, Roberto, following the above discussion. This established an unspoken difference in our communication, and I noticed that others would look around wondering to whom I was speaking when I called him Roberto. He always responded to my calling him Roberto, however. In looking at the above passage, it is significant to note that Roberto uses the Spanish verb *ponerse* in describing how the class chose to give him the nickname, "Bobby". The verb literally means that they (the students and other individuals) "put the name on him". By using this verb, there is a subtle communication of this being a name which was imposed on the student. This subtlety would not have been communicated had Roberto chosen to use the verb *llamarse* instead, which is more common in reference to naming and simply means "to call oneself". I began the conversation trying to find out where he had gotten this name, and he responded with *las personas me llaman Bobby* (the people call me Bobby), rather than *me llamo Bobby* (my name is

Bobby). This further suggests that Roberto was not involved in the choice of changing his name.

A person's name is highly linked to the development of identity and self-concept. When Roberto came to this country, he shed part of his Cuban heritage in the process of integrating into a new culture and surroundings. Through the acquisition of an Americanized name, he further abandoned some of the cultural connection with his Cuban past. In this sense, Roberto underwent and continues to undergo a period of *assimilation* into American culture. In other words, he has given up part of his heritage culture in order to take on the host society's way of life (Taylor, 1991).

Future Aspirations

Often a student's success is directly related to his or her *expectations* for success. In her study of high achieving Hispanic students, Cordeiro (1991) found that successful students had pride in themselves and were able to participate in programs and classes which were meaningful to their future goals. Matute-Bianchi (1986) found that successful Mexican students were achievement and goal-oriented. Furthermore, they saw a link between their experiences in high school and their success as adults. Roberto expressed the following long range goals during an informal taped discussion in English:

> R: When I grow up, ok, when I grow up I like to be uh...I like to be I don't know if I can do it, I like to be FBI.
>
> I: FBI?
>
> R: Yea
>
> I: Why?

R: Because I like to do uhh... police, you know. The police is better than, do like if you have work and you losed and you lost it, you need to go for other work. But I think in police if I start in there I never get out of there cause I like to be that, FBI. I don't like to be the police that have the car with the lights. I don't like to be that because if you are next, after somebody, and then the people look you out the window, they say uh-oh the police next to me. But you can be in the secret car, look like not the police and people go and you can catch them easily.

I: Where did you get this idea?

R: It coming to my mind, looking at TV and looking at TV movies... about police.

What is particularly intriguing about this discussion is the importance Roberto gives for finding an occupation which he would enjoy and desire to continue. In light of the many allusions which he made to danger, death, drugs, and alcohol in our interviews, it is not surprising that he would seek an occupation where he could enforce the "laws" of society. He expressed a sense of inherent rightness and wrongness about various topics and social issues, and frequently made judgments about this culture as compared to his own. He repeatedly expressed concern for law and order in society.

Following our second interview, I asked Roberto whether he would go to college. His response had nothing to do with academic ability; rather he mentioned only that he did not think he could afford to go. "No...(pause)...is too expensive." I mentioned to him the possibility of acquiring scholarship support and he seemed attentive and receptive. We also, on that occasion, talked about the possibility of his using Spanish in whatever he does-- a prospect which appealed to him. By the end of the two month study, Roberto was contemplating becoming an electrician because it seemed an interesting and exciting field to him. He expressed a desire to graduate from high school on several

occasions, something which Hispanic drop-outs tend not to express. As such, I would consider Roberto a goal-oriented individual who sees beyond the realm of high school to his life afterward.

Perspectives on Home and Host Cultures

In his papers and in the interview sessions, Roberto drew comparisons between Cuba and the United States. There was an unusual dualism in his analyses: for example, he would on one occasion hail the U.S. for a particular trait, and then later go on to praise Cuba for being "better" than the U.S. in another important way. It would be of value at this point to consider some of these reflections on his two worlds:

I: Dime más acerca de Cuba, porque no sé mucho.

R: ¿Cuba? ¿qué quiere saber de Cuba?

I: Cualquiera cosa... no sé mucho.

R: Bueno, allá es un pais mejor que aquí. Porque... me gusta más esta ahora porque hay de todo pero, allá, allá por ejemplo, no tienes que estar saliendo siempre en carro, puedes salir en pie en cualquiera hora que tú quieras, nadie te hace nada. Pero, ¿cómo se llama? Si aquí si tú sales solo por la noche te pueden matar...

I: ¿te pueden matar?

R: Aquí... aquí, tú no has visto? que los niños que se roban y eso....

I: Tell me more about Cuba, because I don't know much.

R: Cuba? What do you want to know about Cuba?

I: Whatever... I don't know very much.

R: Well, that country is better than this one. Because... I like this one better now because there's plenty of everything here. But, there, there, for example, you don't have to always go by car. You can go on foot at any hour that you want, nobody does anything to you. But.... what is it called? If here, if you go out by yourself at night they can kill you.

I: They can kill you?

R: Here,.... here, haven't you seen? the kids that are kidnapped and all...

I: Yea, es verdad.	I: Yea, that's true
R: Los niños se roban, entonces, uh...	R: The children are kidnapped, then, uh....
I: ¿y allí no?	I: And in Cuba they are not?
R: Allá no, no. A veces matan a alguien pero es porque está fajando...	R: There no, no. At times they kill someone but it is because he is fighting.

In this dialogue we see Roberto's concern with the danger and senseless killings in the United States. Given his previous statements about why he would like to become an FBI agent, we can infer that most of these perceptions come from the media. He also raises the issue of urban transportation and the inability to walk from place to place with friends in the United States. This may be a contributing factor in his later expression of isolationism in this country. Nevertheless, it is important to note the contradiction even in his lead-in dialogue. He begins by calling Cuba "better" than the United States, but then remarks in passing that *now* he likes this country better. It was difficult to ascertain which culture Roberto more strongly associates with, as he would oscillate between affirmation and disapproval of both countries. Nevertheless, this incongruity lends credence to the assertion that he has experienced and is undergoing a certain level of cultural discontinuity.

Community

A theme which recurred throughout this two month study was the disparity between the community-oriented society of Cuba and the individualism of America. For example, the word *ayuda* (meaning "help") was used repeatedly by Roberto, both in interviews and informal situations, as he described aspects of the Cuban culture. The following dialogue is in many ways the quintessential moment in our interaction. While it is a discussion of the topic of community and human kindness, it is also representative of Roberto's tendency to create narratives in order to illustrate his points. We might say that Roberto used narratives to describe and interpret his world so that others could understand him. This dialogue begins with Spradley's (1979) contrast questioning techniques:

I: ¿Cuál es la diferencia entre la vida allí y aquí?

R: Bueno, la diferencia es que allá hay menos peligro que aquí. Y allá es, por ejemplo, allá se ayudan todo el mundo. Por ejemplo si tú vas a una casa aquí, por ejemplo, tú vas en bicicleta, ¿no? Vamos a poner que yo estoy montado en bicicleta, para mi casa (making noises, imitating the sound of the bike, motioning with his hands...) Entonces, al frente de una casa se me rompe la bicicleta. Por ejemplo, se me va al aire. Entonces, si voy a la casa, a lo mejor si me voy a la puerta, no me quieren, porque tienen miedo de que sé algo o algo de eso. Entonces, allá en mi país nosotros a donde queda tu despare, si vas y esa gente tiene uno de cosa esa.

I: What is the difference between life there and here?

R: Well, the difference is that there, there is less danger than here. And there is, for example, there everyone helps eachother. For example, if you go to some house here, for example, you are going by bike, ok? Let's pretend that I am on my bike, going to my house (making noises, imitating the sound of the bike, motioning with his hands...) Then, in front of the house my bike breaks. For example, it escapes into the air. Then, if I go to that house, probably if I knock on the door, they won't want me, because they are afraid I know something or somethning like that. Then, there in my country, wherever you crash, if you go to the house and the people have one of those

te la emprestan. O si tiene sed y pregunta por agua, te dan agua. Es mejor por aquí por eso, lo único.

things that you need, they will loan it to you. Or if you are thirsty and ask them for water, they give you water. It's better than here for that reason, the only thing.

Once again we see that Roberto has chosen to judge whether Cuba or the United States is a "better" country; the question of whether either country is superior or inferior concerned him throughout our interview sessions. This leads me to wonder whether a message of American superiority has been communicated to Roberto during his year in the United States. Trueba (1989) insists that teachers often explicitly or implicitly socialize the students into particular values. In this dialogue, we must note the contrast between the suspicious *individualism* which Roberto perceives in America, and the trusting sense of *community* within Cuban culture. This perception is consistent with the findings of other researchers who have studied the attitudes of minority children. Trueba (1989) notes that competition is "at the heart of democratic societies with open social and economic systems that maximize individual freedom and free enterprise" (p. 37). He furthermore notes that children raised in a community-oriented, cooperative environment may find it exceedingly difficult to enter a culture of competition.

Racism and Separatism

One of the most disturbing themes which emerged in the course of this study was Roberto's perception of racism and separatism among the American students. This topic came out in particular during a group interview with Roberto and two other Spanish-

speaking students, Juan and Teresa.[2] We were discussing the differences between their lives here, and in their home countries. Roberto remarked that one difference is that in the United States products are more easily obtained. Teresa continued in this vein with what she perceived to be an important difference between Americans and non-native students. Roberto's reactions follow hers:

T: Sí, oh sí, aquí las cosas son más fáciles de obtener, supongo que más baratas, sí. También el trato de la gente, de los norteamericanos porque a veces crees que vas a llegar aquí y van a decir "Ayy! eres extranjera! Ayy! Yo quiero aprender!" Pero llegas, y dices a la gente, yo soy mexicana, yo soy chileno, y la gente no se asombra! Y eso me molesta porque ya están muy acostumbrados a ver gente extranjera, yo digo, como que, crees, no sé, que van a decir... no sé... que

T: Yes, oh yes, here things are much easier to obtain, and I suppose they're cheaper, yes. Also, the attitude of the people, of the northamericanos because you think you are going to arrive here and they're going to say: "Oh! You're a foreigner! Oh! I want to learn." But you arrive and you tell the people, I am Mexican or I am Chilean, and the people don't care! That bothers me because they are already very accustomed to seeing foreigners. I think, it's like, you think, I don't know, that they are going to say, I don't know, that...

I: ¿Que tú eres especial?

I: That you are special?

T: No especial, que... que van a interesar en aprender algo porque a veces yo... a mí me gusta enseñar a la gente acerca de mi cultura y todo, pero la gente no, siento que no les interesa, y también, algunos se burlan de ti...

T: Not special, that... that they're going to be interested in learning something because sometimes I... I like to teach people about my culture and all, but the people don't. I feel that they aren't interested, and also, some make fun of you...

I: ¿Quién se burla de ti?

I: Who makes fun of you?

J: Puede ser los, los, los americanos. Ellos son un poco frío. En Chile, en mi colegio, si llega un gringo, todos quieren hablar con él, oh...

J: It could be the, the, the Americans. They are a bit cold. In Chile, in my school, if a gringo comes, everyone wants to talk to him.

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[2]The other students' and teachers' names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

T: Sí

T: Yea.

J: O ser amigos de él, y aquí tú llegas y dicen hola pero nada más, nadie te va a llamar.

J: Or become friends with him, and here you arrive and they say hi but nothing more, nobody is going to call you.

R: No te ayudan mucho aquí lo único, mira que aquí los únicos que te ayudan son los que vienen de otros paices, ¿no? Aquí, en Mr. Smith's class, aquí.

R: They don't help you much, here, the only ones, look here the only ones who help you are those who come from other countries, right? Here, in Mr. Smith's class, here.

I: Uh-huh.

I: Uh-huh

R: Si llegas aquí, lo único que dice Mr. Smith es que a todos estudiantes que vienen de otros paices, que ayuden a los nuevos, no? Pero no los americanos, los americanos no te ayudan.

R: If you come here, the only thing said is Mr. Smith says that all the students who come from other countries should help the new students. But not the Americans, the Americans don't help you.

T: Sí, los maestros no hacen un esfuerzo para, para juntar, para... y...

T: Yea, the teachers don't make an effort to join the students, and...

R: Ellos sí te ayudan, pero cuando necesitan ayuda ellos. Por ejemplo, si ella tiene tarea de español, allí van contigo, mira mi amigo, mi amigo, pero aquí, después de eso, te dejan...

R: They [the Americans] do help you, but when they themselves need help. For example, if she has homework in Spanish, there they go with you, look my friend, my friend, but here, after that, they leave you behind....

Again we must note that the issue of "help" appears again, as do the themes of American individualism and separatism. Roberto was disturbed that the students who arrived here from other countries received little assistance from the Americans in adjusting to their new environment. He further described the way American students treat him in other classes:

R: Me tratan como si fuera, como si fuera, ¿cómo se llama? como si fuera otro extranjero, más sí, más... más separados. Me tratan más separados, sí.

R: They treat me as if, as if, how do you say it, as if I were another foreigner, more, more separate from them. They treat me more separated, yea.

I: ¿y eso no ocurre en sus paises? Por ejemplo, si yo fuera a Chile a estudiar un semestre, ¿qué me va a pasar, cuando entro en la clase?

I: And this does not happen in your countries? For example if I were to go to Chile to study for a semestre, what is going to happen to me, when I enter the class?

J: La gente va a venir a hablar contigo, te hacen preguntas, van a ser amigos tuyos. Bueno, en general, todos cuando viene un gringo, todos quieren conocerlo, ser amigos de él. Ser amigos...

J: The people will come to talk to you, they ask you questions, they are going to be your friends. Well, in general, everyone wants to be friends with the gringo when he comes. Be friends...

R: Yo creo lo mismo. Yo creo lo mismo. No, si tú vienes a mi pais, ellos te ayudan. Por ejemplo, el profesor dice: "Mira aquí tenemos un nuevo estudiante, necesita mucha ayuda porque habla inglés, no habla español, y necesita mucha ayuda de ustedes. Si le pueden ayudar..." Entonces, todo el mundo empieza a ayudar. Dicen, "Aquí es la segunda clase, aquí es donde es, aquí es donde se comen, aquí hay...

R: I believe the same thing. I believe the same thing. No, if you come to my country they will all help you. For example, the teacher says: "Look, here we have a new student, and he needs a lot of help because he speaks English, he doesn't speak Spanish, and he needs a lot of help from you guys. If you can help him..." Then everyone starts to help you. They say, here is the second class, here is where it is, here is where we eat, here...

J: Y aquí también, como el profesor habla en inglés, y no sé bien como escribirlo en inglés. Entonces, miro al lado para ver como escribirlo en inglés, y me dice "no, no", y yo digo "I don't know how to write", no sé escribirlo y "no.. no.. no..." Creen que estoy copiando...

J: And here also, because the teacher speaks English, and I don't know how to write it very well. Well, I look to my side to see how to write it in English, and they say to me "no, no" and I say "I don't know how to write". I don't know how to write, and they say "no... no...no..." They think that I am copying.

R: Es muy malo.

R: It's very bad.

I: ¿Hay más comunidad?

I: Is there more community?

R: Sí, sí, si no sabes copiar una cosa, te dan un papel, hasta la "a", la "b", la "c", "mira como escribir esto y esto". Pero aquí no. Aquí te dicen "no, no, este es mi papel." Pero allí tu puedes copiar todo lo que quiera. Es mejor, es mejor. Es más unión. Más unión, mucha más unión.

R: Yes, yes, if you don't know how to copy something, they give you their paper, right down to the a, the b, the c, look how to write this and this. But here no, here they say to you "no no this is my paper." But there you can copy all that you want. It's better, it's better. There is more unity. More unity, much more unity.

The question of copying another's work relates again to the differing values within a more competitive society as compared to a more community-oriented society. In Cordeiro's (1991) study of high-achieving Hispanic students, she found that "cheating" was common when the students perceived that it would help them to succeed. However, in the instance which Roberto and Juan describe, the students are speaking of the need to understand what was happening in the classroom. Given the number of times that Roberto repeated the themes of community and separatism, I have inferred that this may be another area of serious cultural conflict. Because of the difference between the extreme individualism among the American students and the unity which Roberto had experienced among the Cuban students, Roberto perceived a troubling level of racism and separatism in the United States.

Attitudes Toward School and Learning English

Despite the cultural discontinuities which Roberto experienced among the American students and some of the teachers, his attitude toward school, learning, and living in the United States were very positive. He gave evidence to this throughout numerous

discussions and interviews. Consider his descriptions of school and life here in the United States:

R: La escuela aquí es muy buena, a mí me gusta mucho. Es muy bueno. Aquí aprendo mucho inglés, porque son muy buenos profesores. También, muy bien las clases. Aquí también es buena la vida aquí... ahh... Es grande la ciudad ésta y hay de todo.

R: Here school is very good, and I like it very much. It is good. Here I learn a lot of English, because the teachers are very good. Also, the classes are very good. Here, as well life is good... ahh... This city is big and there is everything here.

I: Esta ciudad, ¿es grande para ti?

I: This city, is big for you?

R: Para mí es grande y hay de todo aquí, todo lo que las personas necesitan.

R: For me it is big and there is everything here, everything that people need.

I: Uh-huh. ¿amigos?

I: uh-huh. Friends?

R: Tengo amigos, muchos amigos.. amigos. Tengo muchos amigos, yea.

R: I have friends, many friends... friends. I have many friends, yea.

In particular, Roberto's attitude toward the ESL class and ESL teacher were extremely positive and beneficial. He expressed delight in the amount of English which he has learned through this class and commented that he now sometimes forgets his Spanish. Consider these comments which he gives concerning the learning experience in the ESL class:

R: ¿Mi primera clase? Es ESL, es English as a Second Language.

I: Y dime acerca de ESL.

R: Ahh, es una clase que te, que me ayuda mucho a aprender inglés. Y si no, si no tuviera esa clase de primero, yo no sabri, no sabría hablar inglés ahora.

I: ¿sí?

R: Esa clase es la que más me ayuda a mi, ESL, es la que más me ayuda.

R: My first class? It's ESL, it's English as a Second Language.

I: And tell me about ESL.

R: Ahh.. it's a class that helps you, that helps me a lot in learning English. And if I didn't have that class from the beginning, I wouldn't know... I wouldn't know how to speak English now.

I: really?

R: That is the class that helps me the most, ESL, it is the one that helps me the most.

Roberto's praise for the ESL class also has to do with the social benefits which he enjoys. All of his best friends are ESL students. On any given day he could be seen hanging out with these students in the hallways, walking with them to class, or talking with them before school. Roberto and Juan commented to me the difference between Mr. Smith's ESL class and their other classes during a group interview:

J: Sí, bueno en la clase de Sr. Smith somos todos como bien amigos, conversamos entre nosotros. En las otras clases me siento un poco como que llego, saludo un poco, pero igual no me siento tan en confianza. Porque en general los en la clase de Mr. Smith son mis amigos. Y los otros, no tanto. No tenemos confianza.

I: ¿Es diferente para ti?

R: Ah... sí! Es diferente porque mira, esta clase aquí, tiene extranjeros, tiene China, Chile....

J: Brazil, Japón,...

R: Japón, eh... la Unión Soviética, una nueva. Martina, la Unión Soviética.

I: Czechoslovakia.

R: Czechoslovakia, sí... El único pais con que no se hace muchos amigos son los americanos. Yo no sé porque. Ellos si tienen amigos con ellos mismos, ¿no? Pero nosotros somos más, mira, él es de otro país, yo soy de otro país. Somos buenos amigos. Hay millones de otros, una pila gente de otros paises. Y se hacen amigos de otros de diferentes paises, pero en la misma clase allí, y se ayudan.

J: Y eso es verdad. Eso es lo que me han dicho todos. Todos amigos de Brazil, de, de de México, Adriana, Argentina. Todos dicen lo mismo, que los, que los americanos no les gusta ser amigos de nosotros, y no les interesamos.

J: Well, ok in Mr. Smith's class we are all good friends. We talk with one another. In the other classes I feel a bit as if I arrive, greet a few people, but at the same time I don't feel so comfortable. Because in general the students in Mr. Smith's class are my friends. And the others, not so much. We don't have that trust.

I: Is it also different for you?

R: Oh... yes! It's different because, look. This class here has foreign students, students from China, Chile...

J: Brazil, Japan,...

R: Japan, eh... the Soviet Union, a new student, Martina, from the Soviet Union.

I: Czechoslovakia.

R: Czechoslovakia, yea. The only country with whom you don't make many friends are the Americans. I don't know why. They do have friends amongst themselves, right? But we are more, look, he is from another country, and I am from another country. We are good friends. There are millions of others, a ton of people from other countries. And they make friends with other foreign students, but in that same class there, and they help one another.

J: That's true. That is what everyone has told me. All my friends from Brazil, from, from, from Mexico, Adriana, Argentina. They all say the same thing, that the Americans, the Americans don't like to be friends with us, and we don't interest them.

OBSERVED BEHAVIOR

Playful Interaction

Much of Roberto's character and remarks communicate an element of play in them. It appeared that this was a key way in which he both organized, interpreted, and participated in his world. The ability to make light of his surroundings and to find the humor in everyday situations are perhaps some of the reasons why Roberto has succeeded in school, despite the odds which were against him. Because I am convinced that this attribute has facilitated his integration into American society, I feel it is worthy of analysis.

Many of the other students recognize Roberto as the comedian of the class. This was evidenced on one occasion when he was particularly solemn and quiet. The students asked him what was the matter and remarked that his behavior was uncharacteristic. Without his participation, there were fewer off the cuff or humorous remarks made in class that day. I never was able to observe the class without Roberto's being there, but this experience came close. The following are manifestations and evidences of this pattern of play in his daily attitudes and actions in the classroom.

- Joking about having to partner with a girl during a classroom activity.
- Facing the opposite direction of everyone else in the class and listening to his walkman.
- Laughing at himself after making a funny remark.
- Laughing at other students' remarks or actions. He remarks to a student who was typing very slowly: "What's a matter man, you don't got any gas?"

- Feigning sickness: "The problem is I think I'm going to be sick." "Oh, homework, I think I'm going to be sick."

- "Accidentally" tripping someone or knocking someone down and then pretending to be super apologetic: "Oh, scuse me! scuse me!"

- Making mock serious comments about his own background or culture "He is my grandfather." (when asked about Fidel Castro)

- Teasing his ESL teacher by pretending to be very serious about something, element of melodrama.

- Referring something back to his own country when it was not meant to be; after watching something about Tokyo, he remarks: "Look, is my country!"

- Humming and looking away from me after catching my attention during class. He then would repeatedly say a typical American comment: "oh, scuse me! scuse me!" [excuse me]

- Playing with the English language.
1. For example, when Mr. Seaman would pass out a test, he would often say: "Is very dangerous, this test."
2. When asked to make up a character and then describe him, he said "Charlie is very tall and very short. He born in 1965... again."
3. Playing with pronouns: "he? she? he? she?"
4. Joking that "I can't see if I can't speak English."
5. Quickly erasing something before I can read it, he remarks: "It was... unbelievable!"

- Imitating other teachers when they are not looking.

- Whistling, tapping a pencil on the desk, or making other noises until someone notices and then repeating over and over again: "Oh, scuse me!"

Initiative

I have postulated that one of the reasons for Roberto's success in the school system, despite the cards which were perhaps stacked against him, is his tendency to be self-motivated and take initiative in the classroom. The following are observations

which I made indicating that he was unafraid to be active and participatory, both in the ESL classroom and his other courses.

- *Consistently volunteering answers in whole-class discussions.* It was rare for Roberto not to participate in the ESL class. Consider the following from the field notes taken:

  Field note, March 12, 1992: I recorded the interaction between the teacher and the ESL students during a ten minute mini-lesson. Roberto volunteered twice during this time. He was the only student to volunteer an answer more than once. Ten of the fifteen students who participated in the discussion were called upon by the teacher before giving an answer.

- *Asking questions when unsure of an assignment.* During the full-day observation I noted this trend in Roberto. In his Algebra class, which is a self-study designed classroom, whereby the students work at their own pace, Roberto asked the teacher several questions during one class period. There was only one other student who asked questions about his assignment.

- *Decision to take upper level courses.* When I first started observing Roberto he was enrolled in a study hall class one period a day. Two weeks into the study, he opted to take a health class instead, which the ESL teacher described as very challenging.

- *Commitment to homework assignments.* Sometimes we had to cancel scheduled interviews or meetings because Roberto needed to spend the time doing his homework. On one occasion I found him working in the computer room before school in order to revise an essay assignment.

Cognitive Strengths

After observing Roberto's learning style and means of interpreting his environment for several months, I was able to discover some of his cognitive strengths. They include, but are certainly not limited to the following:

- *Bilingualism*: In just one year, Roberto has made rapid strides toward becoming bilingual in Spanish and English. Ballesteros (1979) asserts that bilingualism and biculturalism provide students with more than one point of view. There is thus more area for intellectual growth: "Having two cultural points of view is, then, a definite asset to intellectual development" (p. 32). Roberto's ability to communicate and understand both English and Spanish, considering that he came to this country one year ago speaking only English, is an evidence of strength and intellectual growth. He can flip from one language to the other, often without even realizing it, and can communicate in both comfortably.

- *Rapid Acquisition of Knowledge*: Roberto's Science teacher commented that Roberto was "smarter" than anyone in his class, and that it was only the "language barrier" that was keeping him in a lower level class. Roberto's English teacher remarked on the speed with which he had finished an entire series of mystery stories. On several occasions I watched as Roberto was the first in the ESL class to finish a quiz, assignment, or test. During the time I was in the ESL classroom, he moved up a level in the grammar workbook, decided to take a difficult health class instead of study hall, and worked ahead in his Algebra book. The journal entries which he submitted to Mr. Smith were the longest and most detailed entries which the teacher received from anyone in the class. There was hardly a moment when I saw Roberto "at rest" or "daydreaming". He was generally very kinetic (almost to an exaggerated degree) and active in all classroom sessions. All of these are evidence to his rapid ability to acquire knowledge.

- *Self-reflection:* Although Roberto was unafraid to ask for help if he did not understand something, and although he worked with remarkable speed, he displayed many characteristics of a self-reflective learner. During discussions he was often able to make a comparison between a point discussed and an example from his own life. He repeatedly made reference to Cuba, an indication that he was trying to apply the classroom experience to his own background and life experiences.

- *Organization:* As I observed Roberto's organizational habits, I noticed that he never threw his work in a backpack, or notebook. His notebook

was divided by subject and arranged chronologically. He would immediately return materials to their "proper" location. He never had to search to find an assignment to be handed in. His home life probably encouraged this. As he described his typical day, he was very specific about when he would eat, when he would study, and when he would watch television. This organizational strength was also apparent in his assignments.

- *Concentration:* Although he is very kinetic and active in the classroom setting, he very rarely appears "off-task". This was true in his ESL classes, as well as his other classes. He does however interrupt the teacher's presentations frequently-- a behaviour which may present problems for him in the future if he does not learn to control it.

- *Flexibility and Adaptability:* Roberto's entire process of assimilation into this culture has given evidence to his adaptability. For example, rather than struggling to say sentences with extreme accuracy, Roberto is willing to make mistakes in the classroom setting. He speaks freely in the classroom, often correcting his speech as he goes along. This lack of rigidity has afforded him with more learning experiences than some of the other students. Quantitatively speaking, he speaks and participates more than most of the students in the ESL class.

Others' Perceptions of Roberto

In order to understand Roberto's actions and ideas more fully, it would be beneficial to realize what others' perceptions of Roberto were. Through interviews with teachers and informal talks with the students I was able to ascertain some of these opinions and attitudes. Others' perceptions of who Roberto is have contributed to his sense of identity:

Teachers:

1. His ESL teacher has been struck by the progress which Roberto has made since arriving in the United States. When Roberto first entered the ESL class, he did not speak a word. Mr. Smith was encouraged to see the high level of participation which Roberto now shows.

2. His health teacher had only had Roberto for a few weeks, but remarked that he always is in class before the bell rings and takes notes. He had not

missed an assignment to date and seized the opportunity to re-take an exam which he had not passed.

3. His Algebra teacher has organized an individualized, paced instruction setting. She remarked that Roberto is probably only in the class because of the language barrier; otherwise he could be in a regular math class. She remarked that he is progressing very well and has shown great improvement since September.

4. His Science teacher remarked that Roberto is smarter than most kids in the class and again, is just there due to the "language problem".

5. His English teacher remarked that although Roberto misses some of the basic vocabulary, he often manages to comprehend the higher concepts that other students do not see. She described him as "hard working...basically he's wonderful". Furthermore she asserts that Roberto *decided* to succeed here and therefore has.

Students:
Roberto cannot complain that he does not receive enough attention. In fact, he receives more attention than most of the other students, this owing to his outgoing personality. The students think of him as one who "plays" a lot and causes them to laugh. Nevertheless, their responses to Roberto are generally positive. He is often asked to participate in other people's groups and works well with the students. He has an identity in the classroom as a class clown and other students often try to imitate him.

Characteristics of the ESL Class

Through observations in the ESL class I came to find that the written rationale which the teacher wrote is being put to action. I observed the following methods and characterstics in the ESL class:

1. *Cooperative Learning*: The teacher puts students in groups to work on projects, discuss material, check assignments, write dramatic scripts, form hypotheses. For example, he spent several days on a debate forum whereby the students assumed differing roles and worked toward the common goal of presenting their "case" in front of the class.

2. *Language Rich Environment*: The teacher has students read, write, listen to, and speak English in a variety of settings. The approach is a

whole-language approach. The students respond in journals to what they read, they articulate orally what they believe, and they write about varying topics of interest to them.

3. *Individualized Instruction*: While the teacher uses group techniques for learning, he also is aware of the individual language needs and abilities of each student. He assesses their proficiency upon entering the classroom and adjusts the standards for improvement and grading individually. Often students choose reading assignments which are appropriate for their level. All students work in grammar workbooks which fit their level of English.

4. *Positive Reinforcement*: This is expressed repeatedly in one-on-one situations and whole-group situations. The teacher is very specific in his praise. The comments which he writes on students' papers delinneate areas of success and areas of possible growth.

5. *Home Language*: The teacher often allows students to write in their own language in journals, or to converse with other students in the classroom who speak their language. There was never a prohibition made on this.

6. *ESL Teacher as Liasion*: The ESL teacher was observed conferring with the students regular classroom teachers in an effort to create the most beneficial, and individually responsive learning environment. He also served as a cultural translator in many instances. For example, during the day in Washington he filled this role of cultural translator, rather than transmitter.

7. *Rigorous Curriculum*: The class moves quickly and is challenging. Students are tested frequently and are required to submit essays or homework assignments weekly. There is homework almost every evening. The teacher stresses the learning of even the more difficult aspects of academic English.

CONCLUSIONS

There are various conclusions which can be drawn from the findings discovered about Roberto. The validity of these conclusions is not based on quantitative statistical tests of external or internal validity. Rather they are based on the recurrent schema and patterns which were revealed during the research, and an effort to utilize triangulation to assure the trustworthiness of this data.

1. As expected, Roberto has experienced and continues to encounter cultural discontinuities between his home and host cultures.

- As evidenced by repeated references to his Cuban heritage, Roberto still feels strongly connected to his native culture. However, he also appreciates the new opportunities which he has found in America and shows a willingness to assimilate to this culture.
- The lack of sensitivity and interest shown by American students and perhaps some teachers have furthered this tension.
- Roberto therefore often defines cultural traits within either society as inferior or superior, rather than different.
- Roberto's perception of American students as racist and separatist has resulted in a negative attitude toward forming relationships with them and perhaps a certain bias on his own part.

2. Despite the cultural conflict which he has undergone, Roberto is succeeding in the public school system. Why?

- Roberto demonstrates cognitive and behavioral patterns of strength and adaptability which have helped him to succeed in school.
- Roberto's playful interactive style has been an advantage because it has given him a positive identity among the other students and has enabled him to dismiss or overlook comments made by American students that are sometimes insensitive. Both the ESL students and teacher affirm Roberto as one whose sense of humor is appreciated. Other ESL students often imitate him, which further strengthens his assurance that his personality is accepted and even admired.
- The ESL class has been a source of community and friendship and has compensated for the racism and separatism experienced among American students. There is a strong sense of safety and belonging in the class which was quite apparent in the full day excursion to Washington. Roberto has found close friends and confidants in this environment, as have most of the students. The teacher's repeated use of cooperative learning and group interaction has been foundational in establishing such an environment.
- The ESL class has facilitated Roberto's rapid acquisition of the English language. Because English is taught in meaningful contexts and settings, Roberto has learned both communicative and academic English skills. Roberto's positive attitude toward learning English can especially be traced to the affirmation he receives during these two periods each day.

- The ESL Teacher is a source of inspiration and positive reinforcement and therefore furthers Roberto's positive attitude toward learning. The teacher encourages Roberto to achieve his goals for success both in and outside of the classroom.

3. Given these conclusions, I would recommend the following strategies to encourage Roberto's continued success as well as any minority student's success in the American classroom:

- Encourage all teachers to be sensitive to the diverse backgrounds of Roberto and other minority students. Make teachers aware of differing value systems, such as the disparity between our more individualistic society and other more communal societies. All teachers in the school should be trained in multicultural concerns.
- Greet new non-native students and encourage American students to help them in their process of adapting to a new environment. Perhaps ask for volunteers to accompany the students during the day. Encourage American students who show concern and provide assistance for minority students.
- Find Roberto a mentor from the community, preferably a Hispanic male who could encourage him in his quest for success and bilingualism.
- Find appropriate forums for the discussion of racism in American schools. Perhaps provide a multicultural workshop for better racial and ethnic understanding.

4. The completion of this case study has opened my mind to a world of future studies:

- What are the cultural differences among the varied Hispanic students?
- How does socioeconomic status affects Roberto's progress?
- What is Roberto's home life situation and how does this influence his success in school? (Try to form a closer bond with the mother if possible in order to learn more about his background).
- What is the definition of success and has Roberto achieved this according to such a definition?

Appendix on Ethnography

This was my first experience with microethnography and I therefore felt it would be of value to future educators to delinneate some of my experiences with this methodology. There were both advantages and difficulties in using this highly qualitative form of research. More than anything, through the process of understanding the premise and procedure of ethnography I have realized that it is one which requires continued training and knowledge. As such, I feel certain that my next ethnographic study will reach higher and deeper into the issues at hand.

Advantages

1. Allows the researcher to study selected cases in depth and detail, without isolating any variables.
2. Adaptable to the changing needs of educational research and allows for situational responsiveness.
3. Useful for site-based analysis as it does not aim for universal generalizations.
4. Holistic model is advantageous in cross-cultural evaluation.
5. Begins with a question rather than a fixed hypothesis and allows for continued modification.
6. Purpose is to learn from people not just study people.
7. Analysis based on "their" concepts, not ours.

Difficulties

1. The emerging design may not be revealed for awhile. The researcher may have trouble narrowing the question in this process.

2. Trustworthiness: Various forms of triangulation are necessary to ensure the validity of the report. In my case, it would have been helpful to work with a team of individuals to add another dimension of triangulation to the procedure.

3. Perfect fluency in the informant's language or dialect is required in order to ascertain the subtleties of speech.

4. Time factor: Requires sustained acquaintance with the informant in order to ensure the validity of the project. The researcher must be alert, objective, and sensitive to all aspects of the student's behavior and personality during this whole time.

5. At times I was tempted to want to draw more universal generalizations rather than applying the generalizations to the student alone. All generalizations must be tentative and open to modification.

6. The researcher must become an unobtrusive element in the student's world. This was difficult to establish at times although attending the class regularly before the research was begun was very valuable to this end.

7. Continually checking for personal bias in analyzing and interpreting the data.

8. The ethnographic interview process requires much practice so that concepts and ideas are not imposed by the researcher.

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